



Northumberland County Council

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 07 March 2024

Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report 2022-23

Report of Councillor(s) Guy Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People

Responsible Officer(s): Audrey Kingham, Executive Director for Children, Young People & Education

1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the Tackling Inequalities priority of the NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26 in particular that children and young people have the best start in life and grow up well and that we deliver our statutory functions including being an effective Corporate Parent.

2. **Purpose of report**

This report is to publish to members the Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report for 2022-23 regarding the education of Northumberland's cared for children and care experienced young people.

3. **Recommendations**

- 3.1 1. Members note the education achievements of our cared for children and care experienced young people.
- 3.2 2. Members discuss and understand the continued challenges for our cared for children and care experienced young people caused by the disruption to education during the pandemic.

4. **Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

The report does not require a decision as it is informing members about the experience of our cared for children and care experienced young people during the academic year 2022-23.

5. Background

- 5.1 The Virtual School's approach this year to supporting individual cared for children and care experienced young people was to intervene as early as possible to prevent the escalation of already complex needs, and by doing so achieve better stability at school. What we are 'shouting about' in the Annual Report demonstrates that this approach was successful, acknowledging that there is still work to be done to continue to improve stability year after year. Stand out examples of this are the impressive record of no permanent exclusions of cared for children for 15 years (having prevented at least 29 during the year), much better achievement for 11 year olds, and more pupils achieving stronger passes at GCSE in English and maths.
- 5.2 Although the data does not yet show an improvement in attendance, our strategy to identify and address the underlying reasons for absence is starting to have an impact. Northumberland's Education Welfare Service is also part of the Virtual School and we used this to the advantage of our cared for children. During the year we developed an attendance strategy for Northumberland, and this identifies the main underlying reasons for poor attendance. In turn this led to our Educational Psychologists and Education Welfare Officers delivering support and training on Emotion Based School Avoidance (EBSA). Improving attendance will continue to be a priority next year.
- 5.3 Academic progress is getting back on track and the proportion of pupils following their age-related curriculum has been sustained since last year. This means that a higher number of pupils are making very good progress from their own starting points, and more are starting to achieve in line with their non-cared for peers. Focussing on improving the quality of Personal Education Plans and effective use of Pupil Premium Plus by schools and the Virtual School have achieved this positive outcome.
- 5.4 We want the education of children with a social worker to be part of every day practice for education providers and social workers. To achieve this a multi-agency approach is crucial, and this is exemplified by the collaboration between the Virtual School, Be You and NEWST to embed relational and trauma informed practice across Northumberland. The extent of the positive impact of this work is evaluated in the Annual Report, and although work needs to be done on developing a meaningful data set to inform future work, there is already evidence that education outcomes are starting to improve for this large group of children.
- 5.5 The Virtual School participated in Year 2 of the national Pupil Premium Post 16 Pilot that aims to improve the engagement of care experienced young people in education, training and employment after they leave school. The grant funding from the pilot was used to develop an electronic Post 16 Personal Education Plan and the new post of Post 16 Education Intervention Worker. The impact has been encouraging, and the latest national data shows considerably more young people from Northumberland are still in education, training and employment at ages 17-18 than the rest of England. The Post 16 PEP and intervention worker are now both permanent features of the Virtual School.
- 5.6 The Virtual School's contribution to the corporate parenting strategy focuses on improving outcomes for cared for children with SEND. The impact of the role of the SEND Lead Officer and local authority reviews of SEND processes have been positive, but there is still work to be done to ensure that needs are identified early and placement in appropriate education provision is swift. As an increasing number

of our children are placed in specialist provisions out of county, these challenges relate to SEND arrangements in other local authorities. This improvement work is on-going.

6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

Not applicable

7. Implications

Policy	The Virtual School fulfils the council's statutory duties in relation to the education of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cared for children and care experienced young people • previously cared for children and care experienced young people • and children who have or have had a social worker
Finance and value for money	The current service is delivered within existing budgets and additional DfE grant funding to support Covid recovery and raise academic achievement. Grant funding is allocated on a year by year basis and is intended to cover the academic year. Impact of the grant funding is evaluated in this Annual Report.
Legal	None have been identified
Procurement	None have been identified
Human resources	The wellbeing of all staff is a priority as they cope with the additional pressures of staff absence and vacant posts, and continued high demand for support from schools.
Property	None have been identified
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point Children who are care experienced have been subject to court processes, many of whom will come from disadvantaged backgrounds
Risk assessment	None have been identified
Crime and disorder	None have been identified
Customer considerations	Personal risk assessments are in place for all staff; all education providers have risk assessments in place that are monitored by NCC

Carbon reduction	None have been identified
Health and wellbeing	The emotional and mental health and wellbeing of cared for children is a priority. Improved use of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) is helping to target support and health services to the children and education settings with highest need.
Wards	(All Wards);

8. Background papers

Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report 2022-23

9. Links to other key reports already published

Not Applicable

10. Author and Contact Details

Lead Officer Jane Walker, Virtual School Headteacher
Email: Jane.Walker@northumberland.gov.uk